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ABSTRACT

It is necesary to examine both historic and current events in order to understand the role of race in the United States today. The South's formerly rigid caste system has come to resemble the more flexible Northern social order, which has always been open to blacks in times of labor shortage. A number of important social and economic phenomena (such as a rise in the standard of living, changes in the labor market due to World War II, the economic and cultural integration of the South, and the internationalization of the race issue) helped to bring about this change. The subtle and covert qualities of the conditional segregation which now exists nationwide have led some analysts to suggest that our present form of racial segregation is a temporary residue of historically defunct behaviors. However, this viewpoint does not explain the continuing lack of economic progress among blacks. Therefore, alternative views of black socioeconomic status must be considered. A model which combines the theses of (white) interest group benefit from discrimination, institutional racism, and internal colonialism predicts that unequal race relations will be maintained even with continued economic growth. In order for racial barriers to be eliminated, white privilege must either decline or be redistributed. (Author/GC)

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INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: TOWARD A CRITICAL REASSESSMENT OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

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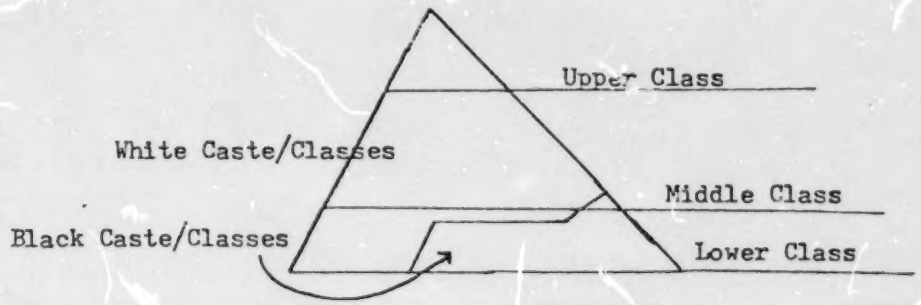
INSTITUTIONAL RACISM: TOWARD A CRITICAL REASSESSMENT OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

The laws against race mixing in public places and T.V. images of overt and clearly racist characters have passed. The upheavals of the 1960s have swept us into a new world which is unfamiliar and very troubling. It is an unfamiliar world because racial codes and practices have changed; the furniture is familiar but the room has been rearranged. This new world is troubling because we are told that the conditions of Blacks have improved and that even the use of race as a factor in determining one's life chances have declined and will one day be of little consequence. Yet Blacks still experience discrimination, are as tightly confined in segregated communities as ever, and in this new world Blacks in the urban and industrial cities are turning on each other at record levels due to hopelessness and lack of direction.

This paper is an attempt to better define the current circumstance of Race in the U.S. What Blacks and the general public are told and what is actually experienced are not identical. Through racial practices and behaviors have changed, it is questionable whether these changes have been improvements. I hope to better reconcile experience with theory and explanation. What we need is a way of viewing race and social change in such a way that after each generation it will not be necessary to yet again ask where are we, what has happened.

WHERE WE WERE

In the South there was an exact, legally prescribed, and all encomposing division between the races. Each caste was exclusively endogamous, socially separate, and perpetuated hereditarily.[1] White was superior and privileged, while Black was inferior and to be exploited. There was strict structural separation; Blacks could not work the same jobs as Whites or serve in the same capacities. As in a caste system, upward mobility for one in the inferior caste could only be through providing services and fulfilling important functions within one's caste. Caste and caste social classes can be illustrated as a social class hierarchy which is horizontally segregated.[2]



In the North the divisions between the races were not as well prescribed as in the South. The circumstances of Blacks varied from region to region and was largely conditioned by the numbers of Blacks present and whether or not surplus jobs were available. Large numbers of Blacks were residentially segregated; if there were only a few Blacks they were more often integrated. In the South if there was a labor shortage on jobs prescribed for Whites, Blacks could not be

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[1] Cox, Oliver, Caste Class and Race, p. 5.

[2]

hired across the caste line. In the North Blacks would be hired only after the supply of White (ethnic) labor was absolutely exhausted.[3] When there was a shortage of jobs Blacks hired during scarce labor periods would be fired or forced off the job even if they had more seniority then more recently hired Whites. Thus, we could characterize race relations in the North as a conditional structural (occupational) and residential segregation.

FORCES OF CHANGE

Where we were or the old order was successfully challenged and changed. The conventional wisdom holds that the challenge was due to the Civil Rights movement and change followed the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act which forbid discrimination and segregation based on race.[4] In retrospect it is naive to think that such a vast change of the country's social landscape was primarily the result a social movement and federal action. There were at least five other 'events' which set the stage for a successful challenge of Southern caste practice.

1. From W.W. II on there was a general upgrading of the economy. Everyone's standard of living improved significantly, and along with general upward mobility, rising expectations developed even within the lower caste world.[5]

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[3]Drake, St.Clair, and H. Cayton, Black Metropolis, pp. 287-331.

[4]Bennett, Lerone, The Negro Mood.

[5]Blau, Peter, and O.D. Duncan, The American Occupational Structure, p. 112; John F. Kain, "Race and Poverty: The Economics of Discrimination", p. 2.

2. Early anti-immigrant laws and then the second world war cut off the supply of White ethnic labor. The expansion of the economy and war production required that even Black be hired. New opportunities encouraged the migration of large numbers of Blacks out of the South into other parts of the country.[6]

3. The opportunities for upward mobility within the Black caste hierarchy were limited. A sizeable Black working and middle class began to develop with an economic basis outside of the older caste system.[7]

4. The self-sufficiency and feudal agricultural economy of the South had largely collapsed during the Depression. The South was slowly being integrated into the national economy and culture. Increasing conflict was bound to occur within Southern leadership over the old (caste) and the new (conditional segregation) and Northern form of racial subordination.

5. World War II internationalized race. Racial segregation was no longer simply a domestic affair. Caste segregation virtually disqualified the American system in its competition with the Socialist world for influence within a world community which began to include independent African and Asian states.[8]

Certainly all of these conditions combined to produce open dissatisfaction with Jim Crow among Blacks and a desire within government and economic leadership to end rather than defend caste segregation. Without these conditions and a

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[6]Johnson, Guy B., "The Negro Migration and its Consequences"; T. Lynn Smith, "The Redistribution of the Negro Population of the U.S., 1910-1960".

[7]Drake and Cayton, op. cit., p. 525.

[8]Myrdal, Gunnar, An American Dilemma, pp. 1016-1019.

desire for change from national leadership, it is unlikely that a mass civil rights movement could have been sustained or that caste segregation would have been outlawed.

THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER

A review of the Civil Rights Movement and the 1964 Civil Rights Bill will show that the focus of racial change was in the South. The alternative conditional segregation of the industrial and urban North was left intact. And in fact, conditional segregation replaced the overt and internationally embarrassing caste system of the South. Conditional segregation was untouched by the Civil Rights movement and legislation because it was impersonal, informally executed, and occasionally allowed mobility. Furthermore, there were no evil-intentioned personalities to react against; no laws forbade racial integration, and no barriers obstructed civil liberties. One could even on occassions move out of the ghetto or advance on the job. These more subtle and covert qualities of conditional segregation have led a number of respectable analysts to suggest that our present and now national form of racial segregation is a temporary residue of historically defunct behaviors. In their minds the circumstance of Blacks presently parallels the conditions of white ethnic immigrants three generations ago.[9] Glazer, et al. anticipated that Blacks will eventually experience the same fate as White ethnics -- gradual cultural and eventual structural assimilation. We can call their viewpoint the immigrant model.[10] Other analysts have noted in recent surveys that prejudiced responses are declining.

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[9]Glazer, Nathan, "Blacks and Ethnic Groups: The Difference and the Political Difference It Makes"; Milton Gordon, Assimilation in American Life.

[10]Idem. See also Joe and Clairece Feagin, Discrimination American Style, chap. 1.

This finding is an important development since a key assumption among many social scientists is that prejudice is the basis of racial discrimination[11] so that as prejudice increases or decreases so will acts of racial discrimination. Also, since the caste line has been eliminated, racial boundaries must now be increasingly the result of social class divisions; race as a social division is declining in its usage and importance.[12] Furthermore, racial discrimination is uneconomical; the social and material cost of racial discrimination makes it prohibitably expensive.[13] For example, discrimination pushes up the cost of social welfare, wastes talent, and lowers the earning potential of Blacks. Thus, continued conditional segregation is allegedly accounted for by the immigrant model, discrimination as uneconomical, the decline of race as a significant social barrier, and a decrease in prejudice as an indicator of a decline in general racial discrimination.

The points above which conventionally interpret continued conditional segregation are not convincing. They are also very troubling. These are three basic realities which are not addressed by the conventional viewpoint. First, it is becoming increasingly apparent that despite the upheaval of the 1960's, the relative economic status of Blacks, when compared to Whites over the last 20 years,[14] has not improved significantly. Economic progress into the 1970s has been all but eradicated by a serious recession, inflation, and record high Black

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[11] op. cit., Feagin, pp. 2-4.

[12] Wilson, William W., The Declining Significance of Race.

[13] Becker, Gary, The Economics of Discrimination.

[14] Thurow, Lester, Poverty and Discrimination.

unemployment.[15] Racial progress was indeed conditional; with a downturn in the economy the conditions for more rigid segregation in jobs and residence have developed.

The conventional response to this reality is that Blacks are after all at the tail end of the stratification system, not because of racism, but primarily because Blacks are the most recent of "immigrants" into the cities and industrial economy.[16] The latter explanation flatly ignores a bit of history. In all of our major cities there was a Black presence which predated European immigration. Among these Blacks were a number of artisans and craftsmen.[17] If timing and skill were the important factors then there should have been a Black presence at the top rather than bottom of the order of ethnic/racial stratification. So from the earliest time if Blacks were in essential jobs ahead of Whites, they were pushed out of them when White Laborers became available. Each ethnic group by-passed Black labor and established their place on the hierarchy of ethnic groups. Blacks have been actively shut out of the labor market except as a reserve labor force.[18] Unlike ethnic White immigrants who are segregated until they could assimilate, Blacks were severely segregated except during times of acute labor shortages.

Another reality which calls the conventional interpretation of segregation into question is that prejudice is not the cause of discrimination. Surveys may show a decline in racial prejudice but there is no apparent decline in racial discrimination.[19] Prejudice must then not be the cause of discrimination as was

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17 Bloch, Herman, The Circle of Discrimination, Guy Johnson, Black Manhattan.

18 Blauner, Robert, Racial Oppression in America.

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previously thought.

The present discomfort with the conventional interpretation of racial subordination results because it is simply incorrect and inadequate. In order to better interpret the factors behind our present racial circumstance we should turn to alternative explanations.

SOME ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

Lester Thurow suggests that discrimination is quite profitable.[20] Whether one is prejudiced or not it is within White self-interest to discriminate. Unlike those who have advanced the immigrant analogy Thurow acknowledges a basic reality: Our economy is and has always been a zero-sum system. Opportunities, wealth, and high status are limited and what counts is how they are distributed. High gains at one end of the economic hierarchy result in high losses at the other end. Exploitation and continued high gains can be institutionalized if there is a permanent underclass. What is important is that White privilege and advantages be maintained. How those privileges and advantages are secured is of little importance and can certainly be changed in response to any threats against White advantage.

A second and related interpretation has its primary focus not on the motivation for discrimination as does the interest group theory, but rather on how racial subordination is achieved. Carmichael and Hamilton (19) asserted that discrimination is maintained through institutionalized racism.[21] Pro-White

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Carmichael, Stokely and C. Hamilton, Black Power.

and anti-Black actions by government, business, and in education are not irrational and uneconomic deviations from standard practice; they are a fundamental part of American institutionalized behavior. In institutional racism the prejudiced or unprejudiced individual is less important to maintaining racial discrimination than are the organization's rules, policies, and informal codes of behavior.

The third interpretation, internal colonialism, is not clearly distinct from the interest group thesis or from institutional racism. Internal colonialism emphasizes that racism and the desire to maintain White privilege in the U.S. are not separate from international neocolonialism.[22] It is no coincidence that caste segregation in the U.S. ended at the same time that direct European colonialism ended in Africa. Certainly the difficulty of isolating and efficiently addressing conditional segregation in the U.S. parallels the indirect, more subtle, and impersonal economic control which the former colonial powers still maintain in politically independent Africa.[23]

The interest group thesis, institutional racism, and the internal colonial interpretation are variant explanations of the same reality - despite massive social change racial subordination continues. They differ in their point of focus but not in their major assumptions. If we combine these three ideas we have a formidable interpretation of race relations. The interest thesis presents an compelling motivation; institutional racism provides a view of the mechanics of how superior-inferior relations are maintained; while internal colonialism places a domestic matter within a broader historical vision and international context.

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[22]Blauner, Robert, Racial Oppression in America.

[23]Nkrumah, Kwame, Neo-colonialism

What we now have after combining these theses is the following explanation of not only our current conditional segregation but of the older caste system as well.

For The Maintenance of Masterial Wealth, High Status, and Privilege	⟶	Manipulation of Opportunities via U.S. Institutions and International Trade	⟶	Results in Different Modes of Racial Discrimination and International Economic Dependence

The combination model is much more specific than the thesis that racial prejudice leds to or causes racial discrimination. The combination model also more accurately interprets current discrimination within realities unaccounted for by the immigrant thesis. What is now apparent is that racism in itself is not a sufficient reason for continued racial discrimination. Racism was not born out of or is it directly sustained by racial hatred. It is rather a consequence of group self-interest and the desire to maintain historic privilege.[24] This thesis tells us several things. First, racism and racial discrimination will not end with continued economic growth. Only the standard of living under continued discrimination would improve, but only after even more material wealth and privilege were attained by Whites in general and the White upperclass in particular. Actions and decisions made by Whites or Blacks in decision making roles, which are not apparently racism but serve White interests, reinforce institutional racism. For example, in labor the seniority principle is not directly racist in intent nor does one have to be prejudiced to enforce a seniority rule. But as long as Blacks have the least seniority the enforcement of a seniority principle will be racist in consequence.[25] Graduate departments

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[24]See Jeffrey Prager, "White Racial Privilege and Social Change".

[25]See Joe and Clairece Feagin's discussion of "Effect Discrimination" in Discrimination American Style.

which rely on graduate record examination scores to indicate a Black students academic potential over a strong transcript of grades and good recommendations are in their own mind maintaining standards. They are also institutionally preserving a place for another White student and keeping a Black student out. If enough decisions and actions which are well intended but racist in consequence are made in enough places, racial segregation and Black subordination will continue unchanged. These examples illustrate the force of institutional rules, informed behaviors, and regulations. We have today as there was in the 18th century during slavery dominant merchants (corporate executives and managers), industrialists, and politicians who are very much aware of their immediate personal and group interests, but are blind to the long range consequence or impact of their decisions and actions on others.[26]

Since the middle 1960s the maintenance of Black subordination through conditional segregation has developed a new dimension. While the Southern caste system kept all Blacks subordinate to Whites and in prescribed, low status jobs, the present system maintains the same subordination but allows token entry of Blacks into higher status and higher class roles.[27] There is a catch: token entries are not free to make decisions or to take actions contrary to institutional objectives and ultimately White group interest. More often Blacks in middle and upper status roles are not free to make decisions of any consequence to the fate of the organization or, more boardly speaking, to the institution. What has happened is that every organization of any consequence in American Society has created and grafted onto the existing hierarchy a parallel line of token and non-

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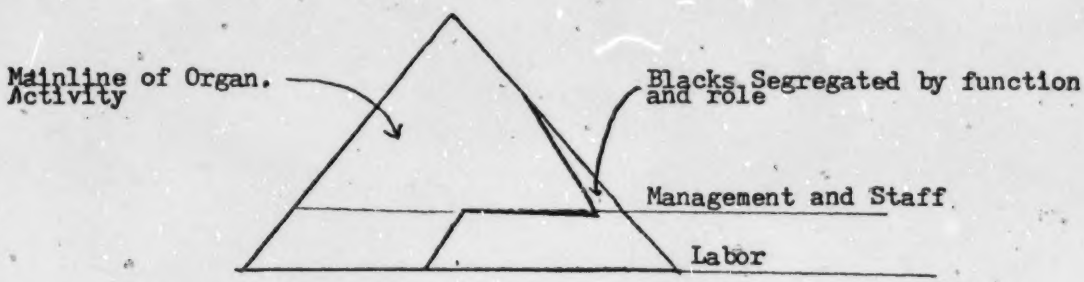
[26]For a discussion of the establishment and early maintenance of White privilege see Eric Williams Capitalism and Slavery, p. 210.

[27]Bowser, B.P., "An Empirical Model and Measurement of Institutional Racism in Large Scale Organizations".

essential roles. The reason for this is to accommodate both the expressed national goal of integration and non-discrimination as well as the maintenance of the status-quo. These new roles are titles without real authority or substance. For example such a position would be a well-paid and prestigious Vice President of Community Affairs, or public relations, or personnel ad infinitum. The following is an illustration of this parallel hierarchy.



With this token hierarchy Blacks segregated by discrimination and at the bottom cannot say there are no opportunities for advancement or no examples of Blacks in positions of responsibility. The organization does not appear segregated. And even if one or two Blacks cross the barrier into the real hierarchy of power, they are cut off from Black group interests and must advance the interest of the institution in order to maintain their position.

For most Blacks at the bottom, their subordinate status appears to be less conditional and more permanent. As the American economy and the economics of the Western World diversify and add new and highly technical sectors and functions, Blacks as well as the White underclass are confined to older and often obsolete industries.[28] The splitting of the labor markets into one of new services and functions and then another of old manufacturing and increasingly obsolete functions will produce a social chasm wide enough that lower status Blacks will literally

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[28]Piore, Michael, "The Dual Labor Market".

be unable to cross it.[29] Like other recent developments the Dual Labor Market was not primarily the result of racist intent but it is so in consequence. The Dual or Split labor system is a logical extension of technological development and social change since World War II. The manner in which these changes and developments have been managed and encouraged will undoubtedly go a long way to maintain White group interests and Black subordination. The Split Labor Market looks more and more like a new caste system in its consequence for Blacks.

In outlining what is the present and immediate future for Blacks from a new perspective I have overlooked the differing roles and possible gains of the various White social classes. Relative to Blacks each White social class will gain, though unequally. Undoubtedly, the White middle class has been enlarged by persons entering new and non-essential jobs which already include Blacks. The White lower class will also be seriously affected by the splitting of labor and economics into two separate systems. One thing, however, will not change in the developing and 'non-prejudice' social order; if there are any opportunities for real advancement they will go to Whites first.

A POSTSCRIPT: SOME THOUGHTS ON INSTITUTIONAL SEXISM

Helen Becker has established that the subordinate status of non-minority women in the U.S. parallels the subordination of Blacks.[30] The modes of discrimination against non-minority women are exactly the modes used against Blacks and the consequences are very similar. There are women's roles as there are Black's role. Women receive significantly lower incomes than men for jobs that are essentially identical or comparable. White women, like Blacks, are under-represented

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30 Hacker, Helen, "Women as a Minority Group".

in critical industries, professions, and occupations. One can go on to say that institutional racism, racial colonialism, and White group interest are in theory paralleled by institutional sexism, sexual colonialism, and male group interest. The broader economic and political circumstances of Blacks and White women are strikingly similar.[31]

As the elimination of racial barriers would mean a redistribution or decline in White privilege so also would the elimination of sexual barriers mean an even greater redistribution of white males privileges and advantages. Robert Stein et al. (19) points out:

> The equalization process for women could result in a considerably higher amount of downward mobility (unless the whole occupational structure changes) than the incorporation of Blacks will mean for the White population.[32]

The authors go on to point out that because of the relative size of the female population, efforts to equalize the status of women could engender more opposition than equalization of Blacks.[33] I would point out that in order for the women's movement to engender greater opposition than equalization for Black, White women would have to be equal or lower in status than Blacks in the minds of White men. It is at this point of relative equalization that the parallels between racism and sexism end.

Though the mechanisms for discrimination against white women and Blacks are virtually the same, the status and roles of White women differ from the status and roles of Blacks. It is incorrect to refer to White women as another minority group. It would be more appropriate to consider White women to be like another

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[31] op. cit., Beagin, p. 42.

[32] Stein, Robert, et al., "Equality for Blacks and Women", p. 670.

[33] Ibid., p. 671

"White ethnic" group. The consideration of White women as the latest "ethnic" group suggests a different dynamic and a different set of historical parallels than the consideration of White women as a minority group does. In fact White women are a multiple ethnic and multi-class group that will more than likely have a fate similar to White ethnics who immigrated to the U.S. White ethnics were assimilated into the dominant social order (White Anglo and Protestant) at differing rates roughly according to their cultural and racial backgrounds. Some years ago William Lloyd Warner et al. (19) outlined the rank order of American ethnic groups as a "Scale of Subordination and Assimilation". This same scale can apply today to the equalization prospects of White women.

WARNER SCALE OF SUBORDINATION AND ASSIMILATION[34]

Racial Type	Cultural Type
Racial Type I Light Caucasoids	Cultural Type 1 English-speaking Protestants
	Cultural Type 2 Protestants who do not speak English
	Cultural Type 3 English-speaking Catholics and other non-Protestants
	Cultural Type 4 Catholics and other non-Protesta, mtosnst of whom speak allied Indo-European languages
	Cultural Type 5 English-speaking non-Christians
	Cultural Type 6 Non-Christians who do not speak English
Racial Type II Dark Caucasoids	Cultural typing the same as for Racial Type I

[34]Warner, William L., et al., The Social System of American Ethnic Groups, p. 288.

Racial Type	Cultural Type
Racial Type III Mongoloid and Caucasiod mixtures with Caucasoid appearance dominant (appearance of "dark" Mediterranean)	Cultural typing the same as for Racial Type I
Racial Type IV Mongoloid and Caucasoid mixtures that appear Mongoloid	Cultural typing the same as for Racial Type I
Racial Type V Negroes and all Negriod mixtures	Cultural typing the same as for Racial Type I

I would add that this scale roughly illustrates the ethnic composition of White social classes. If there is integration of White women into previously reserved male roles it will follow the ethnic-social class order or what Milton Gordon refers to as Ethclass.[35] At the bottom of this scale are Blacks -- men and women. And only after White women (the entire Ethclass system) are fully integrated into roles and jobs previously reserved for White men will Blacks be seriously considered for advancement. As White ethnics passed Blacks due to higher racial status so also will White women. To consider White women as another minority group is to mask two important and determining realities: White women share a privileged racial status with White men and, secondly, White women as do White men have a vested interest in maintaining their racial privilege and status. In a world of limited resources and zero sum realities this can only be at the continued expense of Blacks and the White lower class.

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[35]Gordon, Milton, Assimilation in American Life, p. 53.

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